

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY

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Fear, Love, and Trust

Walking on Water

You know the story found in Matthew 14:22-34. Raging wind. Tossed boat. Jesus takes a shortcut on top of the water. Peter says "Me, too!" and takes a walk on the wild side. Peter starts to sink, yells for help. Jesus reaches out....

Storms. We've been there. Sometimes we see it coming. Sometimes it hits from the side. A hurricane, an accident, a tornado, a terminal diagnosis, a divorce, a blizzard, a sadness so deep it seems bottomless. And we feel small. Scared. Out of control.

Like Peter, we try to test God. Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (v. 28). What might we say? "Lord, if you are really God, end Mom's suffering now." "Lord, if you want me to take this job, give me a sign."

Often, like Peter, we muster our considerable faith and resources, forget our limits and take matters into our own hands. Peter thought he could walk on water. We are tempted to fix it, save it, get over it, and/or get beyond it—whatever "it" might be. We lose sight of God's role in all of this fixing and saving.

And, for awhile we can, like Peter, pull off a Messiah-act and do our version of walking on water.

And, like Peter, we eventually start to sink. We're cut off at the knees. The patch didn't hold. The magic didn't take. On top of it all something else happens.

And, if we're blessed with a faith like Peter's, we cry out for help. We yell, "Help! Lord! Why should I try to be a messiah when you've been there and done that?"

And, like Peter, we can experience the saving arms of God. God—our Creator, our Messiah, our Comforter—gives us enough energy to pray or ask others to pray for us; gives us enough strength to admit our weakness; gives us enough humility to tell our story and ask for help; gives us enough compassion to minister to others; and gives us the willingness to receive the ministry of others.

Ah, we like Peter. We relate to Peter. Full of faith, full of doubt. Both confident and afraid. A bold sinner who sinned boldly. Someone stupid enough to walk on water and smart enough to yell to Jesus for help.

Jesus liked Peter, too. Jesus reached out, always reached out, to teach, mend, fix, and save. As it was for Peter, it is for us.

—Sue Edison-Swift

The First Commandment:

Love the Lord your God. You shall have no other Gods.

What does this mean for us? We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.

Fear, Love, and Trust

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Send in your Reader Call essays on: "God's Presence in Friendship, Marriage, or Divorce," due 3-1-95. "My Story of Violence and Healing," due 6-30-95. "My Nomination for the 11th Commandment," due 7-31-95. Send essays, up to 350 words, to LWT Editorial Office (address on p. 49), noting the Reader Call topic on the envelope. Essayists excerpted in LWT receive one-year LWT subscription.

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imed right at me

our November LWT really hit home. The article "Why Do People suffer?" seemed aimed right at me. I always believed I had a strong faith, and since I began running at the age of 51, I had taken great pride in my physical health and fitness, enjoying the awards. However, since undergoing surgery for breast cancer, as well as facing death for four weeks with an unusual form of pneumonia, both in 1992, I found myself questioning, "What have I done wrong?" "Why is this happening to me?"

Then I moved to the article "The Good Race." I had spent five years disciplining myself to win the race, as the author had. Then came 1992. Was I being punished for my crime? I know God loves me, but I grieve for what I've lost.

Then came "The Grace of Daily Obligation," where I read about a woman who had lost both legs and still manages to give joy to others. I am not the person I was, but at least I can walk and enjoy so many other things. Oh, for a gracious and unselfish spirit like hers!

Mary A. Beaver

Solon Springs, Wisconsin

Mutual Consolation and Grace

Reading "Mutual Consolation and Grace" (September LWT), I was provoked and compelled to write. The article hit close to home. I have been an abused spouse for years, and even though several in my church congregation knew, I never

felt any support from them. They couldn't help noticing the bruises and how I withdrew from social contacts.

I have been in counseling at various times to be able to keep going. When I found out he had forged my name to several things including legal documents at the bank, I broke down and hired a lawyer. Although I have a legal separation, the lawyers allowed him to continue living in my home under a protection order. The mental and emotional abuse has continued, and I never know when he might explode with his violence.

My heart goes out to all those women (and children) that are in a no-win existence with the constant threat of harm. Keep informing the women where to go for help and to go to the law, documenting each event until they get enough collected to make a case as soon as possible.

Name withheld upon request

In "Mutual Consolation and Grace" (September LWT), I feel an important point was missed. This mother (of an HIV-diagnosed son whose partner died from AIDS) needed witness...to be told the means by which her son can be saved. There is still time for him to ask forgiveness and to change, through faith.

I don't know which is worse, silence or incomplete counsel which has overlooked the root of the situation and the solution to the problem. Romans 1:27 shows the man's

condition. He needs to hear what Jesus said in John 8:10-11.

Thank you for a fair opportunity to communicate through LWT "Letters."

*Elizabeth Knaus
Solomon, Kansas*

The story recounted by Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson ("Mutual Grace and Consolation," September '94 LWT) is surely a call to all of us to recall the gospel imperatives. Even as we differ on the interpretation of certain passages in Scripture and have various understandings and convictions, we remember the heart and core of the gospel.

We are called to love one another, to seek reconciliation, to avoid judging and condemning. Jesus warned against self-righteousness,

and he befriended those whom society looked down on.

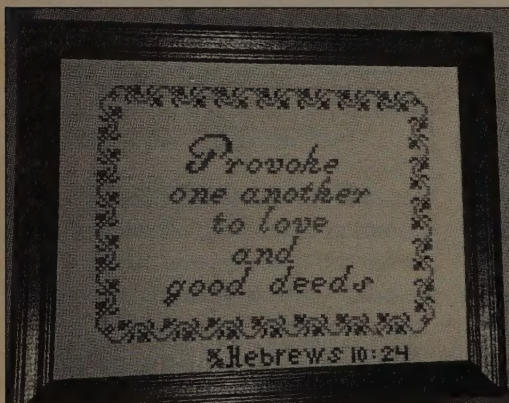
Now is the time to listen to each other's stories, to be open to new understandings, and to give time and energy to the living out of the gospel imperatives.

*Kathryn Lee
Arvilla, North Dakota*

Informs, provokes, unifies

Thank you for the article "Provoking One Another" (September LWT). We need more stories about making quilts for Lutheran World Relief. More information about the recipients of the quilts will give us an increased sense of mission. Looking forward to reading this little magazine every month that informs, provokes, and unifies us all.

*Elizabeth Peterson
Edina, Minnesota*



Janet Masters of Shoemakersville, Pennsylvania, asked her daughter Diana Anthony to render this cross-stitch of the September LWT cover.

LWT sparks nursing home smiles

The article "Kindness and Beauty Rampant in the World" by Marj Leegar (September LWT) was a blessing! Not only to me, but also to the ladies I read it to on my weekly visits to a local nursing home.

It brought smiles and nod of agreement as memories of similar kindnesses and of the beauty of special moments from their own lives flooded their minds.

*Margaret J. Blum
Roberta, Wisconsin*

Of all the commandments, the First, "You shall have no other gods," is the one for which we have the highest of hopes.

"Yes, God, we want to do this very thing you command!" We yearn to have a faith where anxiety never challenges our trust in God. We deeply desire "to know" God in such a way that doubt and anxiety have no place. Deep in our being, even beyond

Anxiety and Faith

Gloria Espeseth

words, is the hope to indeed be able to "fear, love, and trust God above all things."

We are not alone in having this hope. But we may have needless anxiety if we think that everyone else has achieved a perfect, or reasonably perfect, state of faith, of trustful being with God. Throughout the ages, Christian writers of all kinds have recorded their struggle with anxiety in the life of faith. In profound and humble words, this cloud of witnesses has responded to God just as the desperate father seeking healing for his suffering son responded when he said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

As a young adult and lifelong, active member of a congregation, I didn't have a good grasp of this tradition. In the midst of my faith, I remember having questions that troubled me. Yet I didn't dare voice them. I

thought expressing or exploring these anxieties and unanswered questions might make me look bad—or worse yet, might put a “dent” in the pastor’s faith! (I really thought that!)

I had grown up in the church, but I did not know, or had not

“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (Mark 9:24).

retained for my faith journey, the anguish of the Psalmist’s lament: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1). I had not encountered the Christian writers who spoke of doubts and fears as the “dark night of the soul.” I had needless anxiety, in the midst of faith, because I thought I was the only one who wasn’t able to keep the First Commandment.

Then, I experienced a seminary professor, a gifted man of deep faith, who prayed, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” What a revelation this was for me! I began to see that even as a Christian I could have both faith and anxiety.

Yet we don’t revel in our anxiety. To counteract it or begin the dialog with anxiety, we must ask first a very basic question. Who is this God who calls us to trusting faithfulness? The prologue to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2 identifies this God—“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Ah, we have been called to trust YHWH, the God who hears the cries of slaves and does something about it! The

God who remembers relationship established in covenants. The God who is willing to come to us in our vulnerability.

But we are Christians reading the Hebrew Scriptures. So we also profess that this God who did such a mighty deed in Egypt is the same

one who raised

the crucified

Jesus from the

dead and who sent the Holy Spirit to bring us faith and a calling. The God who has lived among us, has known our temptations, and advocates for us (Hebrews 2:14-18 and 1 John 2:1). We have united ourselves in confession that this God who calls and empowers us to believe is Triune: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

It is true that we do not know everything about God. And in fact, it is when we try to know everything about God that anxiety can take over. But what God has chosen to reveal to us is God’s trustworthiness. God invites trust by what God has done in the human story. Digging around in the soil of the biblical story of God and humanity rather than in our own imagination or rational thinking, is basic to a bountiful harvest of trust. The promising story of this God who asks for faith and trust is one of reaching, seeking, reconciling. God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist (see Romans 4:17). In the midst of anxiety that challenges faith, keeping this image and promise clear is essential.

But a word of caution: We are to keep clear the difference between

ology and God if the First Commandment is to retain its power in our lives. The living God who has established a relationship with us and creates faith cannot be reduced to theology, doctrinal formulations, or popular bumper stickers. Sometimes we substitute our thinking about God for God. Yearning to "get it right" and to "keep it straight once we got it," we focus on how to speak about our relationship with God rather than celebrating and delighting in the relationship God makes with us.

Theology is a good thing. Clarifying and defining and thinking about God can help us in our faith journey. But that is not God! In Word and Sacrament, the living God continually addresses us, keeping the connection alive and creating faith in the midst of all the ambiguity and contingency of daily life.

God alone is the focus of the First Commandment. The Commandment has done its work when it directs, and redirects, our thought to God. It is in experiencing faith, loving and trusting God, that the commandment is fulfilled. May we be so for all of us. **G**



The Rev. Gloria Espeseth serves as interim pastor at St. Peter by the Sea Lutheran Church in San Diego, California.

After Fear, Love, and Trust... Then What?

How it looks from the PEWS

We no longer have to remember to pack Cheerios and crayons in our purses on Sunday mornings. Our squirmy kids are mostly grown, some gone. One husband sings tenor in the choir. One ushers. One preaches. Another husband attends just on holidays. One left our church after a divorce. The last is dead, too young.

And so we old comrades from church council, casserole suppers, and Christmas pageants—one by one, by two till six—found our way to each other's side in one pew.

Our pattern was detected by an usher (not the husband) who observed, with raised brow and insufficiently suppressed chuckle, that we were the matrons of the pew. After exhibiting the expected—if ersatz—offense, we decided he was on to something. But not "matrons," we thought. We kept the "pew," added an "s" and capitals, too. And then declared what we were

about was nothing less than Pretty Exciting Woman Stuff. Our collective friendship named, it grew and was nourished with talk and laughter and (often carryover) food at monthly suppers.

We all know Luther's explanation of the First Article of the Apostle's Creed: We are to fear, love, and trust God above all else. The four of us who grew up Lutheran learned it during our confirmation classes. The other two—one a former Roman Catholic, the other a Baptist—who married Lutherans, went through the Small Catechism three times each with their kids.



We all know what Luther wrote, by heart—and believe it, by faith. But what happens when daily-ness drowns out the remembered words?

We all know what Luther wrote by heart. And believe it, by faith. But what happens when daily-ness drowns out the remembered words? We're typically too busy. Going fast. But feeling guilty because we can't go fast enough. We've got jobs outside our homes—clinical psychologist, school principal, association administrator, artists' representative, retail executive, editor. And jobs inside our homes. We're the children of aging parents and the parents of fledgling young adults. Some of us are wives. We all are "housewives," married, indeed, to windows that need washing and furnaces that go on the fritz.

And thanks in part to that usher with an attitude, we are friends who know that right up there at the top of the "everything else" list are all of us. Whatever else we are, we are each others' priority. Those monthly suppers are never set on any day even one of us can't make: no generic "if you can make it" second-Thursday gatherings for us. We need all of us together to connect, to unload, to laugh, to recharge.

So when Lutheran Woman Today was seeking out a group to take on that beast of a word and a concept—*should*—the beast that keeps breathing fire at women's backs as we run through our days, the PEWS met, for we are masters (matrons?) at tripping up *should*. At least for each other. At least for a little while. We come home from our time together with better directions for our priorities. Tears of laughter clear our sight.

But the night we met to take on this task for LWT, laughter came late and slow. The tears that cleared our sight came, instead, from mourning and full hearts. That morning, a Wednesday, we had sat in our pew for the funeral of Louise, an older woman dear to the congregation and to each of us. That evening we sat together again and told of our hours before the funeral, a time of changed priorities.

"I was at church in my pj's at 8 A.M.," said the clinical psychologist, the pastor's wife who lives next door in the parsonage. "I wanted to make sure the funeral pall wasn't wrinkled. I was ironing it over the choir pew when the custodian and the organist came, before I was finished. I was embarrassed, but I didn't worry. I was so involved in Louise."

The morning away from the office—before a major out-of-town conference—started early and anxiously for the association administrator. "I got up at 4:30 A.M. because I couldn't sleep, worrying about e-mails I had to fax to California. By 6:30 I was ready with my floppy disk. I drove my car to high school and went straight to the computer/copy center to print, only to get stuck in line by a lady with 75 pages to print out! I certainly didn't do morning devotions while waiting! And I got home too late for the nap I'd promised myself before the funeral."

She left 10 minutes later than she should have to drive to the church, said the retail executive. "I came so close to giving up, just not going," she admitted. "I felt like I was staving off the dogs as I walked out. At least four senior managers were after me, each with a major problem that had to be solved now. I put a voice mail and ran."

The editor's day began much easier. She had planned none interviews for the afternoon. So the morning was free for preparing the promised cheese tray for the funeral reception. Free for remembering Louise as she worked. "The plant she gave to so many of us," she thought, "was really a 'baby' from the mother plant her own mother had



**We come home from
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once nurtured. I'll put mine in the center of the platter, a sign of her sharing with so many."

An angry shout, "Don't you let your dogs on my yard!" shattered the silence of the morning and the



As the light of that long day went out, we held out our hands to each other and joined our voices in giving thanks.

mourning for the artists' representative who had visited with Louise's family the night before. "I was so peaceful then, walking my goldens [retrievers] and remembering. I can't believe someone could be so totally mad before 7 A.M. And all of the sudden I felt so terribly sad. I had reality."

The principal, too, confronted anger and reality—all before 7 A.M. "A parent had especially requested a 6:30 A.M. meeting, before she left for work, with the staff who worked to help her troubled child," she recounted to us. "We all got there. But she didn't show. We were angry all morning. By noon I knew it was misplaced. The parent was in pain, pain she couldn't face."

And so we opened our hearts, again, trusting.

The ten minutes did make the retail executive late for the service, we remembered. She walked in near the end of the opening hymn and took a place at the end of a pew several rows ahead of us.

She told us, "I remember thinking, What a nice full feeling there is. I'm glad I'm here. Nothing about the office was as important as being here among Louise's friends. And then I turned and saw you. What a treasure, I thought. You're alive! I think that's our priority—to recognize and appreciate the treasure we are given."

As the light of that long day went out, we held out our hands to each other and joined our voices in giving thanks.

"...Fear, love, and trust God above all else." We remember. We do tonight. And we pray that when morning comes again we'll still be able to see our way. C

The author-PEWS asked to remain anonymous.

You shall have no other gods.”

What Does This Mean?

Martin Luther's explanation to the First Commandment is brief and crystal clear: We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else. Simple as those 11 words may sound, however, they carry for all of us profound and diverse meanings, shaped by our background, culture, family, and experience of the faith. To capture some of that rich variety, Lutheran Woman Today asked five people with five different ethnic backgrounds to reflect on Luther's words. They share their thoughts with us in this article.—ED.

God First

Lucia Vargas

When I was little I was puzzled every time I heard that we are to fear God. “¡Caramba!” I told myself, “I fear *el Coco* (the Bogey Man) or the soldier with the rifle standing on the street corner, but God is not going to me any harm, so why do I have to fear God?”

I was glad when I later found out that the word fear also had positive connotation. And positive it is when I think of the awesomeness of God. I am stunned in reverence at the sight of the creator in action. Didn't I feel the tremendous creative energy at work at the birth of my children? Didn't I see a most beautiful creation-dance of sunset, sea gulls, and dolphins from the beach last summer? And yes, there is fear and trembling in my heart at the times when I've felt that I and all that surrounded me were the creation of God's hands. The First Commandment bids me to respect God's supreme awesomeness: it challenges me to treat myself and everybody and everything that surrounds me as the only creatures of God that we are.

“Love God above anything else.” That statement used to be comforting. When I was mad at a neighbor, I still loved God, so it was alright. It is not so easy anymore, however, to divorce love for God from the love for other people. For example, it is difficult for me, a Latina, to love the people who do not love Latinos. But loving

God above all else is now for me the imperative to love God in each of those who don't love me.

For God is in every people, even in those who look down on the ones that look like me. Even if I would be tempted to think that their contempt is worth mine, my love for the One that loves all would save me from deciding whom to love. You see, God's love is such that it does not distinguish between peoples: the friends are as loved as the enemies. Jesus Christ loved those who crucified him because he loved the One who sent him. "Love God above all else" helps me to

The First Commandment...challenges me to treat myself and everybody and everything that surrounds me as the holy creatures of God that we are.

love all and actively work so that all can love all.

To "trust God above all" I must trust in what God's grace can do in any individual human being or in any

human institution. If I despair about a family member, a colleague or even my church, I still can trust in what the Holy Spirit will do for them and for me. It would not be fair for me to trust anyone more than anyone else can trust me. I and all others can fail, and we do, but God never fails. God never fails to fulfill the promise of walking

steadfastly with us toward our empowerment as children of God. When I think of the promise, I can trust in myself and others because I trust in God first.

Dr. Alicia Vargas is a fourth-year seminarian at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. She lives in San Leandro, California, with her husband, the Rev. Dr. Steven Churchill, and their son and daughter.



We Are Made New

Mercedes W. Browne

We need to have God in the center of our lives and allow God's will for us to set the pattern for the exercise of our faith. Such is the foundation upon which we stand as called servants. All other needs and responsibilities seem to pale by comparison.

We are not to see this greatest of all commandments as a legalistic mandate or constraint, but as the liberating force it is, because by it we are united with God's will. We are the brightest and the best when we are being guided by the careful attention of our God.

For me, the trust I have in God has been an agent for personal change and spiritual liberation. The knowledge that I can place

my cares in God's hand is a freeing one. That freedom allows for the full expression of my faith and sharing of my personal witness.

As an African-American woman, I am able to transcend the pain of oppression and discrimination through this freedom. Knowing that I am created in the image of God and placing God above all other things in life is both healing and cathartic.

For many, the word fear in this explanation is paralyzing. "Why would you serve a God that you must fear?" is the usual query. But as we grow in faith and understanding we are able to discern more than a literal interpretation of fear. We can understand fear as a call to reverence and respect.

Respect for the source of all joy. Respect for the omnipotence (God is all-powerful) and omniscience (God is all-knowing) of our God. Reverence for the limitless measure of God's grace, mercy, and love. We learn to trust God as a point of departure, understanding that at all other things will flow from the bounty of God's grace.

The central message we must learn and communicate to others is this: serving the Lord is freeing, not confining. We are made new by God, through a personal relationship with God. A relationship that produces change. A relationship that produces hope. A relationship that is a springboard for new possibilities.

Mercedes W. Browne is Pastor / Developer of Cross of Life Lutheran Church, Plainfield, New Jersey. She is a member of the New Jersey Synod Council and serves as Region 7 representative to the Board of the African-American Lutheran Association.



God's Very Own

ordon J. Straw

When I was about eight years old, I did something I never thought I would. I challenged, head-on, a notion about God that I had since an even earlier age...I walked up to the altar in my grandmother's congregation.

It wasn't that I was going up to receive communion; they didn't practice early communion. I was the only one in the sanctuary. I was there because my grandmother cleaned the church building on Saturdays. She was down in the fellowship hall and I snuck upstairs. I decided to dare God to strike me with a lightning bolt if I walked past the altar rail and up to the altar—I was taught that only the pastor was allowed behind the altar rail!

The moment of truth had come. I looked to make sure that no one was watching, and I tiptoed, trembling like a leaf, past the altar rail and up to the altar. Nothing happened. A wave of relief, and what I would now describe as joy, rushed over me. I didn't get struck by lightning! I then knew something that no book could teach me. I found out what it means to live in the grace of God.

Growing up in the Lutheran church as a child, when I heard "We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else," I only heard the word fear. God, to me, was like Santa Claus, checking his list to see if I was naughty or nice, except that the consequences were more serious. Many Native Americans do not "approach the altar" either, because they have been taught to fear the Christian God. Unless they looked and acted like European Christians, they were taught, they would be condemned to hell.

Standing behind the altar rail, I realized, and now I proclaim to Native Americans and others, that God is not capricious, but gracious; not mean-spirited, but loving; not vengeful, but merciful. God accepts and loves me because of who I am, God's very own. This I trust above anything else.



The Rev. Gordon J. Straw is a member of the Brothertown Indian Nation. He is a doctoral student in systematic theology at Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, Illinois, and a Native American ministries consultant with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

When We Follow the Call

Marie Mauney

Putting God first in life seems like an impossible task. We are created with survival instincts that cry out, "Put self first!" From the time we enter the world as infants, with needs to be satisfied, we learn to view the world with a self-first perspective. But when we follow the call, God's love provides in abundant measure the gifts that we need, not only to survive, but to live confidently.

Even though I sometimes fail to keep God in that first position, I know that recognizing God above all else makes my life rich with spiritual gifts. Each of Luther's words—fear, love, and trust—has had a special influence on me at some point in my life.

In my childhood and early teen years, it was easy to love God. God provided a loving and caring Christian family and congregation; stories and songs about Jesus were a natural part of life. When troubles came, and they did, I felt secure that God loved me. During a six-month period of illness and recuperation, I felt sure that God's love brought me through.

As a young adult, happy with marriage and two wonderful daughters, my relationship with God was in a stage of fear or awe. Secure in God's grace, I was never afraid of God, yet I felt some distance from God. God's omnipotence overwhelmed me. How could the Almighty God, ruler of the universe, be interested in the day-to-day routines of a young homemaker? While I still believed in God's power and control, I had lost some of the intimacy of God from earlier days.

Today I'm in the trust cycle. A trusted friend is one whom you can count on because the friend has proven dependable over and over. That's the way God's concern for me has been shown. Through good times and bad, I have felt the support and love of God through other people. Looking back over my life, I recognize that God's presence in life has remained constant. God doesn't solve my problems, but when I turn them loose and trust God to care, they become manageable.

The command to love God only and no other gods, it turns out, is not something that we do for God. It's something we do for ourselves. Recognizing God's infinite love for us, we learn that complete reliance upon God gives us the promise of God's presence forever.

Marie Mauney teaches Adult Basic Skills at McDowell Technical Community College. She and her husband, Gene, are active members of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Asheville, North Carolina.



Worship the One and Only True God

Fern Lee Hagedorn

I was part of a young adult group that spent Sunday afternoons on the street corners of Chinatown, New York City, evangelizing. We handed out Chinese tracts to passersby and talked about Jesus. In our eagerness to share the good news, we were disappointed that many would not accept the literature.

One older man stopped to take a pamphlet from me. He looked at the

cover, and looked at me and said in Chinese, "Jesus is the White man's religion."

"The God of Christianity is not White, but for all people," I said. "Jesus loves everyone."

He politely listened, smiled, and walked away.

That conversation of 20 years ago remains fresh today. The God who loves me was a foreign God to this man. The language of our

We all have the richness of our own traditions that help form our vision of God. But let us remember that tradition is not God.

dialogue was not foreign, nor were the words on the pamphlet. But the old man already had an impression of the Christian God and had decided God was White.

Often in the past, European and North American Christians have evangelized on behalf of another god—a god that came with all the cultural trappings of their heritages. In doing so, these Christians—consciously and subconsciously—violated the First Commandment.

The history of Christianity in Asia bears marks of this violation. Christianity in India and China, for instance, started in the fifth century, where it coexisted peacefully with other religions with no fear of persecution.

By the 15th century, however, European intervention and conquest in China came accompanied by European Christianity. Beginning in the 18th century, the missionary movement came hand-in-hand with western powers, often subjugating Asian peoples.

History has often represented the God-who-became-flesh as a god who does not accept people for who they are. Or even worse, a god who inflicted suffering and death on people who would not do it "our way."

We cannot change history. We can, however, learn from it. No one of us perceives God neutrally—we all have the richness of our own traditions that help form our vision of God. But let us remember that tradition is not God. We are to fear, love, and trust God, not our traditions. Let us learn from the past—and be challenged to worship the one and only true God. **GC**



Fern Lee Hagedorn grew up in Chinatown, New York City. She is member of St. John's, the only ELCA congregation in Newark, New Jersey. She heads the American Bible Society's Multimedia Translations Program that produces CD-ROMs and videos of Bible stories.

What Do You Fear, Love, and Trust?

Sally Simmel

**I am the Lord your God.
You shall have no other Gods.**

Luther's explanation of this commandment: *We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.*

As this issue of LWT was planned, there was much discussion of how the explanation of the First Commandment, especially the words "fear, love, and trust" plays out in our day-to-day living. What do we fear? Whom do we love? How do we trust? We decided to pose these questions to a diverse group of women from across the church.

A survey (see box on page 18) was mailed to a randomly selected group of women who are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Ministry in Daily Life Network. Such is not a scientific survey. So while we shouldn't draw conclusions from the responses, we can gather insights as we "listen in" to women reflecting on their lives in some profoundly theological ways. Before you continue you may want to complete the survey yourself.

Fear

The first completion sentence about possessions most missed is way of reflecting on what we fear losing. "Most missed" responses included pictures, portraits, family albums, and diaries—"remembrances that substantiate my past, provide focus for the present and fuel for the future," said one woman.

Address books, dictionaries, Bibles, bedrooms, houses, and recordings (records and CDs) are also treasures that would be missed.

When asked what it means "to fear God," responses included:

"...To have those butterflies in your stomach when you go to communion, wanting the eyes that greet you to be the eyes of Jesus—but at the same time wanting to close your eyes so that you won't have your breath taken away by the enormity of the event."

Fear, Love, Trust Questions

Try the survey for yourself. Your answers should be honest, first-thought reactions. If you "go with the flow," you often come to a deeper understanding of yourself and God's direction for your life.

Complete the following sentences:

1. If all of my possessions were blown away in a tornado, I would most miss _____. Why?
2. If I could take one thing with me to heaven it would be _____.
3. The three people I love most are _____. Why?
4. The biggest decision I ever made on trust alone was _____
I felt like _____
It felt like _____
And it turned out _____
5. To fear God means _____
6. To trust God means _____
7. To love God above all else means _____
8. What comes most naturally to me is (fear, love, trust) _____
The most difficult for me is _____. Why?

- “...To recognize that I’m not God.”
- “...To take God’s commands seriously.”
- “...To live in awe of God’s power, with only limited knowledge of God’s purpose for my life.”
- “I don’t fear God but I guess it means to love and trust God.”

Love

Of the three—fear, love, trust (question 8)—love comes out as the most “natural” for the women who answered the survey. As a result, most were hard-pressed to identify only three people they love dearly (question 3). Spouses, children, long-time friends, housemates, soul mates, siblings, and parents all figure prominently in the lives of women.

A campus pastor was mentioned as loved, because “she showed me how to grow up on Jesus.”

Several participants completed the sentence (number 7) “To love God above all else means...” this way:

- “...To see each person as holy and to treat each person as a cherished child of God.”

- “...To focus on being self-giving rather than self-serving.”

For some, love is difficult. The answers to “why?” were very moving.

- “Some people are hard to like.”

- “It’s an acquired trait. Love makes you vulnerable to hurt. I’ve missed close relationships by unconsciously withdrawing, keeping interactions at superficial and surface levels.”

Trust

Further doesn’t use the word “trust” in the explanation of any other commandment. Just the first. Very interesting.

The “biggest decision on trust alone” sentence (number 4) brought all manners of stories. Deciding to get married was a big trust issue. One woman went on trust alone when she married at 19. She said it turned out “Super. I have been blessed.” That was more than 64 years ago.

Another wrote that deciding to leave a marriage is an act of trust and can be “scary, even if best for all involved.”

Getting and changing jobs also ranked high on the trust scale. For one woman changing jobs was like “stepping off a cliff and not knowing how far away the bottom was.” Sound familiar? She said, “It was a very good move. Many changes occurred after that which enriched my life.”

- “Trusting God to provide me with a job involved praying and waiting and not giving up hope.”

To go on living after the death of a loved one, especially spouse, is an act of trust in God. "God's arms are around me whenever I stop to realize God is always there."

Taking risks, for the sake of family or for achieving goals, requires a lot of trust, we were told. But usually well worth it. It's hard to think about leaping into unclear situations, trusting that there will be a net there to catch us. Some responses to sentence number 6—To trust God means...

"...To suspend fear in daily life, to believe I am in God's care and to live without anxiety for my future."

"...To take a risk and a leap of faith."

"...To have faith in God's daily presence in my life."

"...To believe that God is part of what I do and who I am and that God will work through me, in spite of me."

While trust in God was not difficult to describe, trust in general terms did turn out to be the most difficult concept for most of the women who wrote.

"Trusting a stranger is difficult. In today's world there are many people ready to take advantage of anybody and everybody."

"I've spent too much time caring what other people think, and God is showing me now the hurts that led to this, or followed later because of my reactions."

"Trust is difficult, letting go of the notion that I am in charge of my life. Even though I possess many skills, due to the grace of God I need to trust that God is leading me in the right direction."

"My job on earth is to become the free, creative person God intends me to be. Sometimes I don't trust God to be in the midst of it with me."

"It's hard for me to trust that others love or value me. I do not trust myself well enough first. I do trust God more than myself. Trusting is a habit that must be learned."

By seeking God we learn to be spiritual in the world, trusting that God and all of creation is good, including ourselves.

Fear, love, and trust. Three strong emotions that we encounter every day no matter who or what or where we are. You might want to be attentive to them as you move through the days ahead.

God, you have called us to be your people that you will be our God. Help us to fear, love, and trust in you above all else so that together with you we might walk boldly in the world; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen. G

Sally Simmel is Director for Ministry in Daily Life in the Division for Ministry of the ELCA in Chicago. Her special interests include peace and justice concerns, spirituality work with the homeless, refinishing furniture, reading, and travel.

The Hidden Promise

James A. Nestingen



Session 2: The Open Command

Study Text: The First Commandment
Story Text: Matthew 14:22-23

The First Commandment

am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me (Exodus 20:2-3).

What does this mean? We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.

Memory Text: Galatians 3:19

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made....

Overview

When the Holy Spirit takes hold of a person with the gospel, the commandments are no longer necessary. But in this life, Christians are both saints and sinners; people need to hear both the promise and the command. The First Commandment offers both. For when God promises to be our God, God insists on it, using this command and the other commandments to reorder our priorities and drive us back to grace.

Opening

We thank you, gracious God, for your sure and certain promises. Make us faithful believers. And when unbelief wells up in us, keep us under command—drive away our false gods and restore us once more in your merciful forgiveness. Amen.

The Story

Peter's walk on the water is proof, if any were needed, that the Holy Spirit has a sense of humor. But it is far more than a joke—Peter's walk across the waves is a story of how faith and unbelief can come together in the same person, in Peter and in all the rest of us. Jesus had just gotten word of the death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). The greed of a king for a young girl's dance (probably not a very nice dance, given the way kings often entertained themselves) literally cost John his head. It must have been hard enough for Jesus to lose a friend like John; more, he probably saw his own death coming after John the Baptist's. Jesus responded by withdrawing to a lonely place, to be alone for a while and to pray (verse 13).

But Jesus could not get away. A crowd followed him, and, left in the wilderness with nothing to eat, Jesus had to feed them all. Still intent on finding some quiet time, Jesus sent the disciples across the lake ahead of him (verses 22-23). While he was praying, a storm came up, as they often do on the Sea of Galilee—it's a long, narrow lake—and soon the disciples found themselves in trouble.

1. The gospels contain a number of stories about Jesus going away to pray: after his baptism (Matthew 4:1-11); at the time of his transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9); in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46). Some might say that because Jesus went away to pray, he was not trusting God to care for him. How would you respond—was he keeping the First Commandment?

What do these episodes tell you about Jesus' faith in God's promise to hear our prayers?

Apparently the disciples had to fight the storm through the night—a hard and frightening job. They must have worried about a lot of things—the storm, where Jesus would find them again, the boat. In the midst of all of this, they saw Jesus coming toward them across the waves.

2. Matthew says the sight of Jesus terrified, not comforted, the disciples. Why would they have been so frightened?

How did Jesus' reaction to their fears reflect the promise of the First Commandment?

Peter, impetuous as ever, wanted something more than a word of assurance. So instead of waiting for Jesus to get to the boat, he said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (Matthew 14:28). No doubt, if you were a first-century Christian and Peter was your bishop, you would be chuckling about this story now—Peter's brashness got him into trouble once again!

3. Given Peter's name, why would his request to walk on water seem out of line?

It was at this point that things really got wild. Peter got out of the boat and actually walked toward Jesus, right across the waves. It must have been wonderful. But then he panicked and did what rocks do when they are on the water.

4. Why did Peter sink?

Why wasn't his faith enough to keep him on top of the water?

The Holy Spirit knows the difference between a gentle joke and ridicule. So look at what happened: Up to his knees and going down, Peter cried out for help. Jesus reached out, caught him and brought him to the boat. If Peter showed little faith, as Jesus said, and was overwhelmed by his fear, he also showed great faith once more in calling out to Jesus.

5. In Matthew 7:7-8, Jesus instructs us to ask, seek, and knock, promising to respond. Was Peter's cry for help consistent with Jesus' instruction to ask, seek, knock?

Put the "fear, love, and trust" of the First Commandment together with Jesus' request that we ask, seek, and knock. What is the connection?

The Command

If everyone heard and believed the promise hidden in the words of the First Commandment (the gospel laid open in Christ), there would not be any need for the Ten Commandments. But not everyone believes the promise, and no one who believes the promise believes it with the depth and constancy it requires. Faith and unbelief fight it out in us. So God has to take some measures.

The trouble begins where it did with Peter: in the storm. Peter was a person of deep faith, the first to recognize Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8:29-31). But he got caught up in himself, thinking that he should be able to go beyond his limits and do the same thing he saw Jesus do. This is pride. When he got out there and heard the wind whistling around his ears, he suddenly started to think about what rocks and people really do when they are on the water. So he started to sink, into despair as much as into the waves.

Whether the cause is pride or despair, this is what unbelief does. It has us turn for help away from the promise of the gospel toward our own selves and toward things other than God. In the Large Catechism Luther said that when we are caught up in our sins we begin "to seek the help of creatures, saints, and devils"—we are drawn away from God and God's promises.

6. Think about the story of Adam and Eve and their temptation (Genesis 3:1-7). How was Eve's faith like Peter's—how was she strong, and where did she "sink"?

As the Scripture sees it, being drawn away from God is a recipe for death. God is the creator—God has the power of life and can do with it as God pleases. We are creatures. We have been created by God to depend on God for life and everything that goes with it. Drawn away from God, caught up in our own pride or despair, we get separated from the source of life. Death is a sure result.

7. In Romans 1:20-22, Paul identifies sin as not honoring the Creator who can be understood and seen through the creation. How is the Creator similar to the creature? How different?

Confronting our unbelief, God turns to us with the Ten Commandments. It is as though God says, “If you won’t hear my promise in Christ, you’ll have to listen to my commands.” To the same commandment that says, “I am the Lord your God,” also says, “You shall have no other gods before me.”

As a commandment, the First Commandment requires us to turn to God for help in every time of trouble and for any and every physical, spiritual, or emotional need. It demands that we entrust ourselves to God for everything that we need in this life and the life to come. It is literally a command to believe the promise and to live by faith in it.

What does this mean?

The Small Catechism uses three words to describe this relationship with God: *fear*, *love*, and *trust*. These three words take on significant meanings in a context of hopefulness.

8. Imagine that a person has just gotten the “all clear” from the doctor after a cancer scare. From the vantage point of this person’s faith, describe what fear might look like—is it being afraid, or is it more like respect?

How does *love* work—who is loved?

How does *trust* enter in—who is trusted?

When the promise and the command come together, the First Commandment shows us its power. With the promise, God assures us that every good in this life and beyond is ours. With the command, God goes after everything else that we might turn to in order to show us our worth, to eliminate the risks, and to take away our fears.

So we begin to see our idols. They are not the gods of tin, hay, or stone, like the idols of ancient peoples. Instead, we make idols of personal strength or appearance, spouses or families, houses, jobs, and possessions. Anything that we depend upon for our value or significance, anything that we might use to hide behind or to protect ourselves, has a way of turning into an idol. They all can draw us away from God, stick us with ourselves and so hand us over to death.

9. Name some common idols in personal and public life. The determining factor is if they draw people away from the promise of God.

There is a fine line between faith and idolatry, but it is clearly marked. The difference is in thanksgiving. Faith, too, depends on other people and on things in the world around us. But faith knows all of these relationships as gifts of God's hand, and so faith is always giving thanks for everything God bestows. Unbelief detaches the gifts from the giver, ignoring the concealed hand of God and God's hidden promises.

10. Paul claims that the opposite of boasting is not humility but thanksgiving (see 1 Corinthians 3:21-23). How does boasting exclude thanksgiving?

How does it exclude faith in God?

The promise of the First Commandment has a way of turning into an indictment, accusing us of our unbelief. But God will not forsake us. If we do not hear the promise in faith, God will take us on with this commandment until we long for the promise once more. This is the message of the memory text, Galatians 3:19.

Looking Ahead

Promising to be our God, God wants to keep in touch. So God tells us God's name, encouraging us in every way to use it properly while warning us against every misuse. God gives us the Second Commandment.

About the author: The Rev. James A. Nestingen is a popular speaker and author of several books on Lutheran theology. A gifted storyteller, Dr. Nestingen is a professor of church history at Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

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Supplementary Resources

The monthly study sessions in LWT of *The Hidden Promise* are complemented by 1) a **Leader Guide** (Code LT2-9526, \$4.25), order one for each leader; 2) a **Resource Book** with helpful background information (Code LT2-9525, \$5.50), order for individuals as interested—comes with free accompanying **Audiocassette** that features study writer Nestingen introducing each session with a story.

Also available are a **Pocket Calendar** (Code LT2-9512, \$1.95 each; \$19.95 for 12), **Daily Bible Readings** (Code LT2-9538, \$2.25 for 12; \$15.75 for 100), and an **Informational Videotape** narrated by the author that introduces the study and its resources. Purchase the video and receive a coupon for two free resource books with the purchase of five or more resource books (Code LT2-9424, \$9.95).

A copy of Luther's *Small Catechism* will also assist your study (Code No. LT15-6733, 80 cents each). Order by calling 1-800-328-4648.

Brief Prayers on News Items

Sonia C. Groenewold

♦ Women from former Yugoslavia work for peace

Twenty-eight women from all republics of the former Yugoslavia met at the invitation of organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation. Through voluntary work with traumatized women and children, refugees, and displaced persons, participants said they can reject the logic of aggression and political terror. To avoid future armed conflicts, they called for non-violent conflict resolution to be taught in schools.

Gracious God, empower us as women to share our wisdom and advocate for peace.

♦ Namibian churches elect Lutheran woman

The Council of Churches in Namibia elected as its vice president a Lutheran clergywoman, The Rev. Julieth Khariseb, from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia. This Lutheran church body is one of three Lutheran churches in Namibia. Namibian Lutheran women hope for a united church.

God of Unity, help the Namibian churches to hear their women's voices and their calls for unity.

What issues and people in today's news can you add to your daily prayer list?

♦ Lutheran students gathered at New Year's

Lutheran students from across the country met in St. Louis, Missouri, during the New Year's holiday for their annual Lutheran Student Movement-USA gathering. The organization is an independent, pan-Lutheran group with students from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. This year's event was also ecumenical.

Creator God, fill the students who gathered with a strong sense of your love and mercy. Be with them in their daily lives.

♦ California church feeds unemployed, homeless

Members of Grace Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in McKinleyville, California, pitch in to cultivate and harvest vegetables in a vacant lot the congregation owns. The food is used to help the area's homeless and unemployed. Not yet self-supporting, the congregation is enthusiastic about sharing its bounty with those who have none.

Generous God, we don't have to be rich to share our blessings. Create in us the will to reach out to others in need.

Sonia C. Groenewold is senior news editor for The Lutheran.

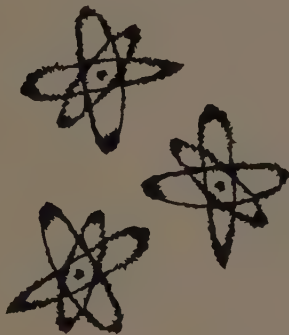
Alice by the Water Fountain

Marj Leegard

Alice and I were the only ninth graders taking both biology and chemistry. It was not because we were such good students that we wanted to be challenged. It was because we didn't like Home Ec.

Baked apples filled with cooked oatmeal and touted as a breakfast dish made us sick, and our teacher returned our buttonhole samples with the question "What is this?" Besides, we had both decided that there must be better things to do in life than housework. In 1935 that was not a common idea.

We went into Miss Daley's exotic classroom with its smells and charts and prepared for two hours of mystery. She chose to begin with butterflies, and I sat back happily ready, for butterflies I understood. And then the world came crashing down around my ears. I peeked across the row to see how others were reacting but there was only calm. Miss Daley began to explain orders and families and *lepidoptera*, I think. And I thought butterflies just grew from caterpillars! That was mystery enough for me. But there was total chaos. Butterflies were not created butterflies but



hatched out of some complex plan of definite order which it seemed I was expected to memorize.

Then it was time for chemistry.

Alice and I grew up before the advent of required science classes. Before field

trips. Before children's programming on TV explained the workings of the world. Here we were, fresh from total disillusion about butterflies, and about to learn that water is not water but molecules and atoms and hydrogen and oxygen. I never thought I would long to be back in Home Ec., ripping out crooked bias tape.

The two hours came to an end and I stumbled out into the hall and stopped by the water fountain to wait for Alice. I was a skinny ninth grader torn from my moorings. Alice came with her blond braids swinging and a big smile.

"Alice," I said, "did you know anything about this?"

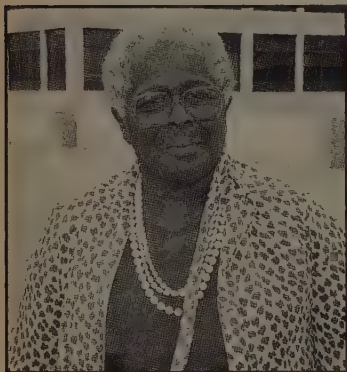
"No," she said, "But isn't God wonderful?"

LWT columnist Marj Leegard, Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, is a retired farmer and active writer and speaker.

A Gardener of Hope: Gloria Luster

"I'm stupid and stubborn," Gloria Luster says with some pride and a lot of good humor, "and that's what it takes to get some thing done, because everyone is quick to come out with the negatives."

Luster has a way, it seems, of turning negatives into positives. Her current project: take 14 city lots in the poorest part of Baltimore, Maryland—one whole city block—lots surrounded by boarded-up, abandoned houses, lots used as a dumping ground for every imaginable sort of garbage—and transform them into a garden. *The Power of Hope Garden*.



"We raise more than vegetables," says Gloria Luster, "we raise people's self-esteem."

Baltimore has an adopt-a-lot program in place that allows any city resident to use an empty lot for a garden. It makes good financial sense. "There can be from 3000 to 5000 lots sitting empty in Baltimore," says Luster. "It can cost the city \$2000 a year per lot—to try to keep a lot clean."

Once Luster was given the lease for the 14 lots, lots of labor was needed to clear away the refuse. She turned to the people

who frequent the soup kitchen that is run by members of her congregation, St. John's Evangelical Lutheran. In return for their assistance they receive "braggin' rights"—they can be justifiably proud of the part they play in growing the produce being eaten at the soup kitchen.

The second step was to improve the soil. "I called the city and asked if I could have some of their leaf refuse. They asked me how many *dump truck loads* I wanted. I ended up with 32 truckloads of hot (half-rotted) leaf mold. Luster, a certified master gardener, knows the organic value of hot compost. "I garden God's way: no pesticides or fertilizers."

Gloria Luster serves on the ELCA Hunger Committee for Region 8. She applied for, and received, a small grant from the ELCA hunger fund to assist with her efforts.

Soon residents of the areas surrounding the garden joined in the effort, and the 14 city lots truly became *The Power of Hope Garden*. "Along with the gardening I'm teaching safe environmental practices," says Luster. "A sense of community builds. The

ardeners learn there is an order to things. They learn things need to be done on time.

"I watched a woman from the neighborhood one day—she thought she was alone in the garden. She had her hands outstretched wide. She was with God and she knew it. Later she told me, 'The air smells so good around here now.'

"First there is hope, then a dream, and then there can be a reality. Now the folks from the neighborhood have started a street association. They are working on rehabbing the abandoned housing that rings the garden. For the garden's opening ceremony, the street—filled with broken glass and everything else—was cleaned up. That was a year ago, and it's stayed clean since.

"An eleven-year-old boy who works with me in the garden can now spell photosynthesis and explain the process. He said, 'I want to be a person who grows food when I grow up. What do you call that kind of person?'

"I wanted to come up with a fancy title. I said, 'You want to be an *agronomist*.'

"God watered the garden until this summer when the city helped out by fitting the fire hydrant with a special device and allowing us to water the garden for free."

As the peppers, tomatoes, beans, eggplant, cabbage, cucumbers, okra, and other vegetables are harvested for use by the soup kitchen and by the neighbors, Luster is planning a winter crop. "I think we'll plant rapeseed; the plants' long roots will help break up the soil."

She'll also be demonstrating how to pickle, can, and dry the produce to keep *The Power of Hope Garden* alive through the winter.

Luster tells about the opening ceremony when city officials and police came to mark the first planting of the garden. "The neighbors brought out their chairs for the VIPs to sit on. I said, 'You will sit, you are the VIPs here. We will stand.'"

According to Luster, "The neighbors around the garden say, 'The do-gooders who come to save us, they don't care nothing for us.' " They know Gloria Luster cares for them and that this caring emanates from an abiding faith and hope. **AC**

—Sue Edison-Swift



During a summer visit to the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Gloria Luster checks out one of the container gardens growing on the roof of the parking garage.

For more information about congregation-supported gardening, contact Job Ebenezer, ELCA director for Environmental Education (800-638-3522, ext. 2708).

The Family Farm

The family farm is fast disappearing from the countryside. By the year 2000, half of the existing 2.2 million farms in the United States will disappear, and the majority of those are expected to be family-sized units.* Then, it is estimated, 50,000 very large farms will produce three-quarters of the nation's food.

Some questions arise: What will happen to the price of food once the production is in the hands of a few? How will our country differ from other countries where most of the land is owned by a small percentage of the people? Such questions haunt us as the structure of agriculture continues to change in our land.

Historically, women played a key role in the success of a farm. Rural women are still involved in every aspect of their communities, and like their urban sisters, they suffer from inequality in the job market, lack of child care availability, health care, and other social services. Many must look for work off the farm to subsidize the family income.

According to a recent study by the Center on Hunger, Poverty, and Nutrition Policy at Tufts University, poverty is a problem of growing proportions, affecting nearly 14 million children in the United States in 1992. From 1973 to 1992,

the number of U.S. children living in poverty increased by 46.8 percent. This trend continued even during periods of economic growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Children living in poverty in rural areas increased by 35.6 percent from 1973 to 1992 (from 16.6 percent to 22.5 percent).

If these child-poverty trends continue over the next 20 years as they did from 1973 to 1992, the number of poor rural children will increase by 25,000!

As Congress prepares to pass the 1995 farm bill next year, ask your members of Congress to support policies that address the problems of family farmers described here. Your action can be an excellent way to support Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's emphasis on women and children living in poverty. **AC**

—Marian Nickelson

**From the Office of Technology Assessment of the United States Congress.*

For more information, contact the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs; 122 C Street NW, Suite 125, Washington, D.C. 20001, (202) 783-7501.

God's People Pulling Together

Barbara E. Crammer

If you had asked me a year ago, I never would have thought I could grow this much as a person, you know, spiritually. I have to admit that before the hurricane I was a very materialistic person. I really was one of those people who believed that whoever had the most toys wins. But now I know that love and friendship are all that really matter."

That was Justine Albrecht speaking who, along with her husband Doug and their toddler son Donnie, are recovering after Iniki, the hurricane that hit the Hawaiian island of Kauai, September 11, 1992. It took almost two years to rebuild their home after the hurricane. Justine calls their new home "A Friendship House," because it was built with an outpouring of love and volunteer labor.

Iniki was incredibly powerful, classified as a category level 4 hurricane, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being most damaging. Iniki is also one of very few hurricanes that made landfall during daylight hours. People watched in helpless error as the wind and water literally blew their lifestyles away. When the winds finally abated, thousands of voices were saying, "Thank God we're still alive."

It is hard to imagine the devastation a storm like Iniki leaves behind. In a few short hours so many things we take for granted simply ceased to be: clean water, toilets, electricity, refrigeration, telephone, stores, supplies, radio, and TV.



Justine and 2 1/2-year-old Donnie Albrecht sitting in the doorway of their new living room.

Devastation is everywhere: houses destroyed or heavily damaged; clothing, furnishings, and toys scattered over the landscape; trees torn down or stripped of their foliage; and businesses blown away.

When Justine and Doug finally returned from the shelter, nearly all their belongings were scattered in the surrounding sugar cane fields. For weeks there was no way to clear any of it off—no water, much less hot water, soap, or a washing machine. It was over a month before electricity was restored, six weeks before they got dark-brown water and several more weeks before the water cleared. The clean-up tasks were exhausting.

**Iniki is a
Hawaiian
word meaning
“sharp” or
“piercing,” as
in winds or
pangs of love.**

Massive recovery efforts on Kauai started almost immediately after the hurricane. The first priority was food and shelter. The Army, National Guard, and Red Cross set up temporary shelters, tent cities, portable sanitary facilities, and feeding stations for fresh water and food. Read about the Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response on page 35.

The next phase in the recovery was rebuilding but first the debris had to be cleared away. Anything salvageable—sinks, toilets, undamaged construction materials—was carefully saved and reused. Soldiers and volunteers helped dispose of the rest in two huge pits.

Justine and Doug were among the lucky ones—they had one safe room to live in. Consequently, they were fairly low on the priority list for help rebuilding. Concerned about all the belongings they had worked so long and hard to acquire, Justine and Doug built a temporary framework over their former living room and placed blue plastic tarp over it to keep out the rain and the scorching tropical sun.

Over the following months, hundreds of gallons of water collected in the many depressions between the studs. Worried that the water's weight might bring the whole thing down, Doug pushed some of the water out of the tarp with a broom. Justine watched from the adjacent hallway. To her horror she saw the lumber and hundreds of gallons of water crash down on her husband.

Terrified that she had lost him, at that moment she realized that nothing in this world mattered more than her husband and son and their being together. She resolved then to never be so concerned about material things again.

Doug was badly hurt, but alive. He shared her feelings and resolve. Through this brush with death they felt more strongly bonded to each other, to their son, and to God. The

felt that God's guardian angels had protected him.

Soon more "angels" arrived in their lives. The outpouring of love by God's people to help this devastated island was incredible. Individuals, congregations, synods, many church organizations, and parochial schools sent contributions to help in the relief effort. Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood provided matching funds and additional gifts.

Over fifty people participated in the effort to demolish, clear, plan, rebuild, and donate materials, supplies, and money towards the Albrecht's home over a two-year period.

Justine says: "It was a very humbling experience. I give God total credit—every step of the way, for every volunteer, every donated box of nails. The biggest lesson I've learned is the difference between 'subjective wants' and 'objective needs.' I used to think that I needed all those things I wanted. Now I really know the difference. I thank God over and over for my spiritual enlightenment. You know, I knew all this before, like every other Christian. I just pray that other people will know the difference like I do now. I'm a lot closer to my Lord through this whole thing." **CAG**

Barbara E. Crammer served as intern pastor at Christ Lutheran Church in Mililani, Hawaii. A participant in the ELCA Multicultural Writers Workshop, she is seeking a first call in the Northeastern United States.

After Iniki

Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response

Kris L. Shafer

September 18, 1992, I arrived on Kauai as the Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response (ILDR) consultant.

ILDR is a cooperative ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. My assignment was to assess the damage and organize relief efforts with Lihue Lutheran Church.

The ELCA's Lihue Lutheran Church is the only Lutheran congregation on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai. Its ministry began 113 years ago, making it Pacifica Synod's oldest congregation. Its 325 baptized members host 60 island children in an accredited preschool, and 15 to 17 children in an after-school care program.

Following the hurricane, there were tales of massive losses. About 70 percent of the membership suffered destruction or major damage to their homes. For many, like the Albrechts in the accompanying article, their houses were their only financial security.

But the hurricane's long-term effect is even worse. The

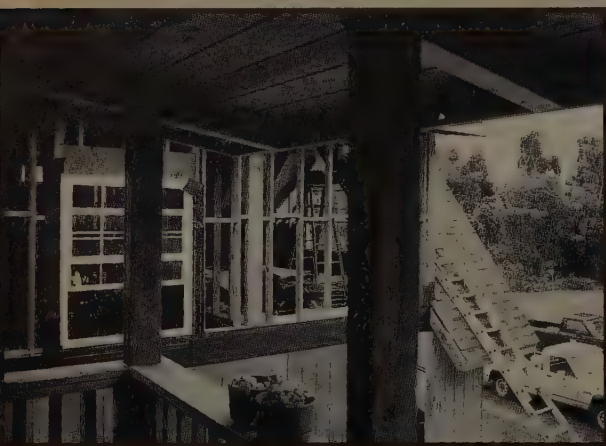
island's primary sources of income—tourism and agriculture—will take years to recover. Residents shared with me that Kauai was nearing full recovery from 1982's Hurricane Ewa when Iniki struck 10 years later.

Hospitality truly is the business of the church. I witnessed innumerable examples of love, support, and concern for neighbors, friends, and family. When the disaster struck, members of Lihue Church were propelled into service. The congregation purchased and installed a washer and dryer, available for any in

Sister congregations supported Lihue Church's ministry with gifts of cash, flashlights, candles, batteries, radios, and more. ILDR sent lanterns, stoves, and a large reconditioned army tent to supplement the space needed to continue operation of the preschool program.

But the story of Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response after Hurricane Iniki is much more than this. Whenever and wherever ILDR responds to urgent needs, stories of ministry and miracles follow.

Gifts to the Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response Fund are always needed, to recover from past disasters and so that funds are available for immediate response to future disasters. Send your donations to Inter-Lutheran Disaster Response, P.O. Box #71764, Chicago, IL 60694-1764. •



The Albrecht's "Friendship House" in progress.

need. A member family, renters of the former parsonage next door to the church, fed anyone who dropped by. People identified the church as a place of care and solace and came to the former parsonage for food, shelter, showers, companionship, a listening ear, a shoulder, a hug, and a chance to sleep under a roof.

Kris Shafer's first ILDR assignment took her to the U.S. Virgin Islands in 1989. Since then she has helped with relief efforts in Vermont, Florida, and Hawaii. "I go to wonderful places in terrible times," she says. She serves as the ELCA Volunteer Development Coordinator at the Lutheran Center in Chicago.

My Borning Cry

Susan Gardner Zager

"I was there to hear your borning cry, I'll be there when you are old. I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold." John Ylvisaker

The choir began to sing "Borning Cry." Here it comes, I thought. Don't they know how this song hurts me?

The first time I heard this song I was pregnant with my first child. I carefully saved the words from our church bulletin and planned to request this song for our baby's baptism. Like my new parents, my husband and I excitedly planned and anticipated the arrival of our baby.

Everything progressed normally until that awful day three weeks before my due date. An ultrasound indicated that there might be a problem with the baby—further tests would provide us with more information. We went home and prayed. We knew that the Lord would help us deal with whatever problems our new baby might have.

The next day, as I was being prepared for the tests, we were told that our baby's heart had stopped. We were devastated. I felt abandoned and alone even though my husband was there to support me. Where was God?

Labor was induced. In the early hours of the morning our son was born. I remember the eerie silence as he was delivered. There was no borning cry, only the soft voices of the doctor and nurse as they went about their business. I remember hearing my husband whisper "I love you" in the quiet of the birthing room. How was I going to get through this? Immediately after our son was born we were able to hold him in our arms and say our good-byes. He looked so beautiful and so peaceful.

The first time I heard this song I was pregnant with my first child.

In the days and weeks following we were embraced and lifted up by our friends, family, and church. Most important we were allowed to grieve. I felt the love and support of Christ working through these people but each day brought painful reminders of our loss. At church there were babies everywhere. It seemed as if there was a baptism every Sunday. I prayed for help and for healing.

Slowly the Lord answered my prayers. God gave me

*I began to think of our baby
as a miraculous gift that we had
for just a short time.*

words to express my feelings and friends to listen with their hearts. God gave me a loving husband who could acknowledge my pain with just a look or the squeeze of a hand. God gave me coping skills to

deal with painful situations and explanations. I began to think of our baby as a miraculous gift that we had for just a short time.

The choir began to sing "Borning Cry" and I began to listen. The Lord was speaking to me. God was there to hear my borning cry and he will be there when I am old. God rejoiced in my baptism and in seeing my life unfold. God has been with me through all this and God will stay with me through all that is to come. God gives me peace. ☪

Susan Gardner Zager thanks her former congregation, Grace Lutheran, Casper, Wyoming, for their outpouring of love during a difficult time. She currently lives in Sugar Land, Texas, with her husband and two young daughters and is a member of Joy Lutheran, Richmond, Texas.

There are many helpful resources and support groups to help cope with miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death. One such group is Compassionate Friends, a self-help organization for parents (and siblings) who have experienced the death of a child. Contact Compassionate Friends at P.O. Box 3696, Oakbrook, IL 60522-3696, (708) 990-0010 to be referred to one of their 640 local chapters.

Commandments Most Meaningful

Lutheran Woman Today issued a call to readers, asking, "What is the most meaningful commandment to you?" Here are three responses.

Love the Lord

The bold red letters on the bumper sticker said "JESUS IS A LIBERAL." I did a double take as I was driving down the street. Mentally, I came to a dead stop.

Jesus is a liberal? Wait a minute. I had to think about that statement. Would I have been quicker to agree if the bumper sticker had read "JESUS IS A CONSERVATIVE"? As a woman who leans to the "right" on most issues, the bumper sticker words threw me for a loop.

My first thought was, "Jesus is a liberal regarding what?" Liberal about today's "hot" issues: abortion, homosexuality, capital punishment? Liberal meaning to love the sinner and hate the sin?

Webster runs the gamut defining liberal from "marked by generosity and openhandedness, bountiful, broad-minded, tolerant," and especially not bound by authoritarianism, orthodoxy or traditional form," to "lacking moral restraint, and licentious."

Jesus certainly fits the first part of Webster's description of liberal—generous and tolerant in his love, forgiveness and healing. Bursting

beyond the Pharisaic laws, Jesus spoke of the great and first commandment in the law—to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. Not bound by legalities, he added another commandment—to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus reinforced the first commandment given to Moses by God, yet extended it further to encompass all of humanity.

The basis of my spirituality, the faith I hold in Jesus the Christ, can only come from acknowledging my Lord and God through his Holy Spirit. As I walk this earthly, spiritual journey, I continue to struggle, yet strive to follow God's first and greatest commandment.

And I may find myself becoming a liberal after all.

*Susan Fletcher
Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

Observe the Sabbath

From the time of my infancy when my father carried me in his arms on the streetcar each Sunday morning to church in Omaha, to my present years as senior citizen in Van Nuys, California, keeping the Sabbath Day holy has been an habitual rite as necessary and enjoyable as eating and drinking.

When I was a teen, however, I chafed a bit when my father prohib-

ited going to a movie or any other form of entertainment on Sunday afternoons. I would argue, unsuccessfully, that my washing dishes after a Sunday meal was work and should be similarly banned.

Still, father had a point: In keeping the Third Commandment, I would be more inclined to keep all the others. Observing the Sabbath would, in effect, be placing God first in my life. Instead of invoking God's name disrespectfully, I would be singing God's praises and communicating with God in prayer. Through Scripture readings, sermons, and Sunday school instruction, I also was made aware of my obligations to others—friends, strangers, and to society as a whole.

Keeping the day of rest is not merely a duty but a joy! For my part, I want to go regularly to church for my soul's refreshment. I want to receive Holy Communion, and I want to establish a closer relationship with God and other Christians.

When I am unable to attend church, the seven-day week seems long and monotonous. I need a day set apart to create a positive focus for my thoughts and activities in the following week.

Thus, I conclude that, "Observe the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you," is the most meaningful Commandment to me.

*Virginia Hendrickson
Van Nuys, California*

Honor Your Father and Mother

A few years ago our two oldest sons, who attended college in the North Carolina mountains, gave us a surprise visit the Saturday before



Mother's Day. My husband Larry, our younger son Bruce and I were just finishing dinner when they walked into the kitchen.

"What are you doing here?" their father asked.

"Why didn't you let us know you were coming? Have you eaten?" I questioned.

As soon as we quieted down David and Brian chimed, "We came because it's Mother's Day!"

I felt so good, I cried as I hugged and kissed them. And I thought they hadn't had time to even think of Mother's Day!

Above my desk I have a Dennis the Menace cartoon. Dennis, in his pajamas, is kneeling by his bed with hands folded. The caption reads "Thanks for inventing me." That's the way I felt that evening...and still feel when I think about my life, my parents, my family, my God.

Even though both my parents are dead, I think about them every day. Sometimes I worry I didn't honor them enough while they were alive. Did I do enough for them? Was I a good daughter? Did I pay enough attention to them in their later years? Did I surprise them as my children did me? Did I make them proud to have invented me? Do I make God proud?

As a daughter I pray that I lived up to my parent's expectations. As a mother and child of God, I pray that I live to honor my father in heaven that my days may be long in the land the Lord my God gave me (Exodus 20:12).

*Tiffany Traynham Klappenbach
Roswell, Georgia*

Faith and Finances: Making the Connection

Bonnie B. Belasic

Do you know Anna? She may be a relative, a friend, or a member of your congregation. She may even be you.

Anna is a woman of faith. She knows the gift of faith is crucial in her life. Yet she isn't always sure about the way she lives her faith from day to day. For example, lately Anna has been struggling with money issues.

Anna decided that journaling might be a good way to sort out her questions and values about money matters. To help her focus on the faith-and-finances connection, she wrote to "Faith" regularly in her journal. After a couple months, and after some soul searching and reflecting, she went back to reread her journal, this time writing questions and comments on the side. Let's look in on her dialogue with "Faith" and with herself.

October 15

Dear Faith,

It's only Wednesday and payday isn't until next week. I hate this. Every month it's the same. There's never enough to get from one paycheck to another. What will I do? Jennifer needs more school supplies. Alex has his heart set on a bike for his birthday. Kim has outgrown every pair of jeans. The doctor's office is calling for payment. How do I handle all of this? Maybe I can win the lottery.

Am I maybe looking for miracles to pull me through financially? Do I make the same kinds of decisions that keep getting me in tough financial situations? Hmmm.

October 19

Dear Faith,

Maxine's grandmother left her \$250,000 in her will. She's worried about handling that much money. She asked me what she should do. I told her I wished I had that problem. I could figure that out in a minute.

How much money is needed for "wealth" anyway? Is it only money? Why do I always compare my wealth to others?

October 20

Dear Faith,

I've been thinking about what I wrote yesterday. I really don't know what I'd do with \$250,000. It's just that I've been so worried about not having enough money! If Jennifer got her school supplies, Alex his bike, Kim his new jeans, and the doctor her money, I'd still have \$249,337 left. I see Maxine's dilemma now. She believes that she has to help someone with this money, not just herself. It's not an easy decision.

I keep seeing pictures on TV showing how so many people in the world are poor. Much worse off than my family and I are. Should I maybe be doing something to help the poor? If so, how can I make a difference?

October 24

Dear Faith,

Pastor said that borrowing beyond our ability to pay back is stealing and a sign of idolatry. Who does he think he is? Doesn't he know that we live in a society where borrowing is normal? Our economy depends on it. What does he mean? Idolatry? I don't worship money.

Boy, this is a lot to think about. I wonder just how much money is enough money? I think I'll come back to this question later.

October 25

Dear Faith,

As I watched the news last night, Kim said, "Mom, why don't we just give one of the homeless people our spare bedroom?" How simply children see the world. They don't realize how dangerous it is. Can you imagine what could happen to a family doing that? All these murders and rapes and robberies—they scare me. It's just not safe to relate to strangers today.

I know how Jesus would treat strangers. Maybe that's enough to know. Again, this'll take more thought—and prayer. It's not easy.

October 28

Dear Faith,

Jennifer asked me why we are so poor. I asked, "Who said we were poor?" "You did, Mommy." I've never said that. Where do children get these ideas?

Did I say that to Jennifer? I remember my Dad always talking about being poor, but don't think I do that. I'm trying to notice who I talk to about money—and who talks to me about money. My sister and I had the same parents but we have very different ideas about money.

October 30

Dear Faith,

Judy and I saw the most beautiful dress in the store today. I would love to have it. But it's such an extravagance. I couldn't possibly

y \$50 for a dress. Judy said it would look
vely on me and I should buy it. I can't spend
at much on myself.

November 1

ear Faith,
ll bought a new set of golf clubs today. He
t angry when I said we needed to put the
oney in the bank. Why am I the only one
no thinks about saving for the future?

November 5

ear Faith,
axine still hasn't figured out what to do
ith her money.

November 7

ear Faith,
Judy came by with the dress I saw in the win-
ow. I'm shocked. I can't accept this. There's
o way I can ever give Judy that kind of pre-
ent. I think I should return it and get the
oney. But what do I say to Judy? She would
ever forgive me.

November 10

ear Faith,
ennifer said Judy's dress makes me look
appy. She said I should wear it all the time.
ill says he thinks so, too. That made me
ink. My family seems to see a lot that I don't
ee.

November 12

ear Faith,
ill got a raise today. I wanted to talk about
ow we'd use it. He said he'd invest it and I
ouldn't worry about it.

November 14

ear Faith,
im took 10—count them, 10!—cans of food
o Sunday school today without asking. I am
o angry with him. How am I supposed to feed
ne family this week?

*Why is it hard for me to spend
money on myself?*

*Money, and our attitudes
about it, is a big part of a
husband-wife relationship.
We need to talk more.*

*What money decision is
hardest for me to make,
I wonder?*

*Judy gave me a gift with no
strings attached—it was hard
to get used to. I realize that I
often use money to control
people.*

*It seems my money journey is
part of a bigger journey—my
spiritual journey.*

*Why should Bill always make
the money decisions? I need to
be more involved.*

*Is my God one of scarcity or
abundance?*

November 18

Dear Faith,

I saw Maria in the store today. She wondered if Kim could eat at their house tomorrow. She said Manuel missed seeing Kim after school all week. Kim told me that he and Manuel were working on a science project every night after school. I thought Kim was eating dinner at their house.

Money values affect relationships.

November 19

Dear Faith,

Kim wasn't coming home for supper because he didn't want to eat Jennifer's and Alex's share. I feel so awful. What kind of messages am I giving my kids? Why did I make a little boy with a big heart feel so bad?

I'm glad I'm thinking about money issues these days. It's teaching me what I fear, love and trust.

November 22

Dear Faith,

Maxine decided what to do with her money. She'd been reading about the needs of children. Some of what she told me made me cry. She said she has to help stop the poverty and abuse. So she's investing part of her money to make more so she can help more kids. And then she's going to open a store to sell children's artwork and give the proceeds to those living in poverty. She wants education to be a part of the store but hasn't quite figured that out yet. She does know that she can't thank her grandma enough. **CGA**

Do I see money as a gift? If I could do anything I wanted and had all the resources to do it, what would it be? Why don't I get started?

Bonnie Belasic is director for Communication and Stewardship Interpretation for Women of the ELCA.

If you would like to explore faith-and-finance issues in your life, take part in a Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America "Money, Security, and Spirituality" retreat. To get your name on the mailing list for future events, write: MSS, Women of the ELCA, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189 or call (800) 638-3522, ext. 2733.

Thankofferings

What is a Thankoffering in men of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?

It is a gift of thanks that grows out of our relationship with God and our commitment to share the Gospel. Thankofferings are a primary source of funding, representing about 40% of Women of the ELCA worldwide's income.

How are Thankofferings collected?

Some women put money in their offering containers every day, some write a check at designated times. Some Thankofferings are collected during a Sunday worship service, others by the congregational staff in circles or general meetings. Some women give Thankofferings once a year, others more often.

How are Thankofferings transmitted?

Congregational units send all thankofferings directly to the churchwide office: Women of the ELCA, 35 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631-4189.

How is this money used?

A large part of the Thankoffering goes to fund our annual gift to the ELCA. In 1995, this gift is anticipated to be \$1,100,000, and will include \$500,000 in gifts for specific ELCA ministries and \$600,000 for total outreach of the ELCA, as needed. (Next month, the Women of the ELCA column will focus on designated gifts.) Most of this money

comes from the Thankoffering.

Q: How does the ELCA use the gift we give?

A: It is used for witness and evangelism, service and justice, leadership and education, missionary and volunteer support—across the church and around the world.

Q: How are Thankofferings used for Women of the ELCA?

A: Part is used for Women of the ELCA programs and resources to carry out our emphasis on women and children in poverty.

Q: Where do we find services and devotions to use as we gather a Thankoffering?

A: Find a Thankoffering devotion in this issue of LWT; see page 46. And watch for a Thankoffering devotion in each February issue. Find a Thankoffering service that may be used during a Sunday worship service in the Fall 1994 Women of the ELCA Resource Packet. An additional copy is available by calling Bonnie Belasic at 800-638-3522, ext. 2733.

Together, through our Thankoffering gifts, we give witness to our faith in God and help the church and the women's organization spread the Gospel, tell the story of God's loving grace, and help women grow in faith and ministry.

Charlotte E. Fiechter
Executive Director
Women of the ELCA

Thankoffering Devotion

Ruth Ann Kachulis



We Gather ^[1]

Hymn of Praise

“We Give Thee But Thine Own” (Lutheran Book of Worship 4)

We Pray

All: Gracious and loving God, we come to you today with hearts full of praise and thanksgiving. By your Word you save and redeem us, and call us your very own. Your Word is indeed a lamp to our feet, a light to our path—and the joy of our hearts. Amen.

Meditation ^[2]

Leader: Close your eyes, relax and take a few moments to loosen tense muscles. Draw in a deep breath, and exhale slowly. Now listen to the story of the woman who anointed Jesus, adapted from Mark 14:3-9. ^[3]

Leader: It was a warm day in early spring only a few days before the celebration of the Jewish Passover. All Jerusalem was alive with expectation at the coming feast, when the history of the Jews would be repeated in song and prayer. It was a time when the story of God’s covenant with them would be spoken and remembered again and again. It was the story of the one to come, the Messiah, the one anointed and chosen to lead them. Envision yourself in this time and place. Be among the people, feel the excitement and the anticipation.

Suddenly you are aware of a group of men shuffling by you, their voices hushed and tense. You follow along behind them, unseen and unexpected guest.

The sun’s rays flow behind you into a long narrow room filled with the dust of many feet, as the men gather around a low table filled with bread, cold meats, cheeses, and wine. Among the men is Jesus of Nazareth, a man you have heard much about lately.

appears tired and in need of food and rest. As the guests are seated and begin to speak quietly to one another, a woman unexpectedly breaks into the room. Her eyes search the crowd until she finds the one she is seeking. Jesus turns to her and sees her and welcomes her without speaking. As she approaches, all conversation stops, all eyes turn to her. She is unwanted in this room full of men. Acting against tradition, she is bold in her movements and sure in her actions. She pulls a flask of precious oil from her robe—tears spilling down her face—breaks the jar, and anoints Jesus with the oil!

The men begin to protest her actions in loud, angry tones, but Jesus' voice rises above the others. "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me."

Hers was an astounding act, an act filled with absolute love and trust. She was not frozen with anxiety, and any fear she had she overcame by her love and respect for this man, Jesus.

Reflect ^[4]

Leader: Now open your eyes slowly. As you return to this time and place, reflect silently for a few moments on the world of the woman in Mark's story, as I ask you these questions:

What does this woman's radical action say to you about what it means to fear, love, and trust God?

What do you think it means to be "one who anoints"?

How does this kind of action free us to be the people of God?

Prayer of Blessing

Leader: Jesus said in Mark 14:9, "Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

We hear your words, O Lord.

We call upon you, O Lord, in this time of preparation, this long time of waiting and watching for the celebration of the goodness of the feast to come.

We are the women who wait.

O Lord, we wait for the opportunity to do a radical act of love; a radical act of giving. We long to do a fine and beautiful thing for you.

We give what is most precious to us as a sign of the coming kingdom.

O Lord, you have called us to be women who anoint.

We anoint others with our gifts of love.

We are, by the act of this one woman, empowered to do fine and beautiful things for others and for ourselves.

A: We are empowered to challenge, to risk, and to give freely.

L: Receive, Lord, the gifts we bring.

All: Amen.

The Thankoffering is Gathered ^[5]

We Pray:

All: O God, following your commands can lead us into radical action, and it is just this kind of action that shows us the freedom you intend for us. We are often fearful. Help us so that our fear does not cause us to hide. Help us step out boldly and trust in your promise. Lead us to give of ourselves and our possessions radically and freely, in love. Amen.

Benediction

Leader: The God of the covenant go with you, empowering you to act without fear, love without condition, and trust always in God's freeing Word. Amen. **GCA**

Ruth Ann Kachulis is a post-graduate student at Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa. She is mother of three grown daughters.

Notes:

1. This Thankoffering devotion is especially appropriate for use during Lent by Women of the ELCA in small groups or general meetings. Find the Thankoffering, suitable for Sunday worship service, in the Fall 1994 Resource Package or call 1-800-328-4648 ext. 2733 for a copy. LWT plans to carry a Thankoffering devotion each year in the February issue.
2. Arrange the chairs, and perhaps a few floor pillows—for those who can and want to do meditation from the floor—in a circle, or circles.
3. Some may choose to present this story section as a pantomime/drama or liturgical dance.
4. In small groups, participants may share their reflections with each other as they wish.
5. During the offering a hymn may be sung. Consider "Song of Commitment" (p. 32) or "Woman of the Night" (p. 52) from Women of the ELCA Worship Resource Book 1.

Women of the ELCA Thankofferings are sent directly to the churchwide office, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631. For more information, see page 45.

Bulletin Board

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8765 W. Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631-4189
1-800-638-3522 ext. 2743
FAX: 312-380-2419

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